

204/CPAS

4 MAR 92

Special Analysis

MIDDLE EAST-
SOUTH ASIA:

Courting CIS Muslims

Senior officials from Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey are crisscrossing the Muslim heartland of the CIS as competition for influence in Central Asia and Azerbaijan intensifies. Muslim leaders in the CIS hope to exploit the competition in order to gain economically, but they are wary of involvement in regional rivalries or of providing opportunities that Islamic radicals could exploit.

Iran is working hard to project itself as the primary intermediary between the CIS and the Muslim world. Foreign Minister Velayati visited Baku and Yerevan last week in an effort to mediate the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan, according to press reports. In the past two weeks, Iran has sent relief convoys to the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan, clearly with the intent of establishing a presence in an area Turkey considers to be within its sphere of influence.

In mid-February the leaders of Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, which make up the Economic Cooperation Organization, met in Tehran and, largely at Iran's initiative, extended full membership to Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Tajik Foreign Minister Kayumov told US officials that the ECO summit was largely a propaganda forum for the Iranians and that they pressed him repeatedly for his reactions to Secretary Baker's tour of the region. Tehran hopes to promote the ECO as the core of an Islamic "Common Market," Ankara, however, is lukewarm to the concept and almost certainly wants to prevent Tehran from using the ECO to advance its interests in the region. Turkey is vigorously cultivating direct bilateral ties to Commonwealth Muslim states. Its primary economic interests, however, remain with the US and the EC.

APPROVED FOR RELEASE

2/81 b1 b3

N.R.

continued

N.R

CIS Muslims Receptive but Cautious

Muslim leaders in the CIS are interested primarily in developing ties to wealthy capitalist states in Europe and Asia that might help finance their economic and state-building requirements. At the same time, they hope to profit from the competition among Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia while carefully staying out of regional quarrels. Uzbekistan's recognition of Israel last month indicates that the Muslim leaders probably will avoid knee-jerk reactions to issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict. Most have publicly warned that, while they want good relations with Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, they have no intention of creating theocratic states.